<center>**"Swipe Night is Fun, but Useless"**
An Analysis of Tinder's Swipe Night, an Interactive Foray in Online Dating</center>

Lauren C. Rouse[†]
University of Central Florida, lauren.rouse@ucf.edu

Rachel N. Winter
University of Central Florida, rachel.winter@ucf.edu

Abstract
While the Tinder application has, since its inception, facilitated the gamification of dating through its fast-paced, turn-based interactions, the debut of the hypertextual fiction Swipe Night further underscored the game-like interactions of the platform. As the formation of both communities and romantic relationships increasingly occurs via digitally mediated communication, a study of Tinder's Swipe Night event provides essential insight into both the gamification of human interaction and audience reception of these developing technologies.

Keywords
dating, interactive fiction, gamification, social platforms

<center>**Introduction**</center>
While interactive fiction had a long history prior to the development of digital communication technologies, widespread social media use has facilitated the development of new forms of interactive narrative (Piredda et al.). For instance, the dating platform, Tinder, released the interactive Swipe Night game in October 2019, which allowed users to play through a narrative, making choices that impacted the resulting storyline. Swipe Night was intended to connect users to new matches via their choices from playing, a deviation from Tinder's usual matching via geographic proximity alone. The story played out over four weeks, with each week continuing the story from the week before. The in-app interactive narrative was largely successful, with over a million people tuning in each week (Tinder has 5.7 million subscribers) (Perez).

The Swipe Night trailer began making its rounds on Tinder and other social media apps (like Instagram and YouTube) in late September 2019. In the 45 second trailer, users were introduced to the concept of the narrative: "Every Sunday, experience an interactive adventure where your choices can lead to matches. But you only have till midnight until the adventure is over" (tinder, *Official :45 Trailer*). The interactive narrative was written and released in four parts, and each subsequent part premiered on the next Sunday from 6 PM to midnight.

This paper explores user reactions to Swipe Night using a cross-platform approach, specifically looking at the r/Tinder subreddit on the social networking site reddit. Swipe Night connected users with the familiar genre of interactive fiction and Choose-Your-Own-Adventure, and provided opportunities for further connection with other users; yet, user responses to the fiction indicated that users had negative reactions to some of

<center>1</center>

narrative choices. Swipe Night therefore simultaneously highlighted the app's ability to promote offline connections and indicated the impact of platform context on users' experience of interactive fictions.

Methodology

Tinder's affordances enable only private, one-to-one communication, making the tinder community difficult to study from the platform itself. In order to gauge user reactions to Swipe Night, we therefore needed to develop a cross-platform methodology. Cross-platform research can "enhance the understanding of how users navigate the information space, process information, and make use of platforms" (Hall et al. 896). The reddit platform, with its topic-based discussions (termed subreddits) provides a space for Tinder users to discuss their experiences in an interest-based community. Furthermore, reddit's primarily anonymous method of communication may encourage users to communicate more openly than identity-based platforms like Facebook, which attach profiles to users' real names and photos.

This paper therefore examines social media reactions to Swipe Night through a small case study of the subreddit, r/Tinder. r/Tinder has 3.3 million members that coalesce on the site to discuss everything about tinder. Most of the time, users post screenshots of their first messages to matches, or bios that they come across while using the app. r/Tinder has various community features like a once-a-week profile review that allows for users of the subreddit to review and post their own profiles and get feedback from other users. Further, the subreddit has a chat where users can meet one another and discuss dating. When Swipe Night was live, users turned to the subreddit to discuss their endings, how to use the interactive narrative, and their own matches following the event.

In order to assess users' reception of the Swipe Night event, we searched for the term "Swipe Night" on the r/Tinder thread and scraped the text data from the top 50 most relevant threads using the free web scraper Parsehub. Once the data was collected, we manually removed content from threads not specifically related to Swipe Night. Data from the remaining 25 threads were then entered into Orange, a data visualization tool. On Orange, we ran the data through sentiment analysis.

Sentiment analysis refers to the use of natural language processing (NLP). When applied, it looks at the specific phrasing of text, as well as the context for the word to determine if the user had a positive, neutral, or negative reaction when writing the comment. When completing sentiment analysis on Orange, the data was placed into a heat map, which orders the data in positive, negative, or neutral categories, and colors them based on their affective ranking. Data that correspond with a blue color are negative responses; while the data that responds with a yellow color are positive responses. However, a data tool may have trouble reading negations, jokes, sarcasm, or exaggeration. As Pang et al. note in regard to sentiment analysis, "it seems that some form of discourse analysis is necessary [...] so that one can decide when the author is talking about the [thing] itself" (7).While this is a limitation of sentiment analysis, including the neutral response for the data, as (Koppel and Schler) argue, can "improve the overall accuracy [of the data]". Neutral responses are important, as not all statements have a sentiment. "The sun is hot,"

or "the dog is big," are both neutral statements as they have no sentiment, instead of being positive or negative.

Literature Review

Interactive narratives and digital games share many commonalities; Ryan argues "narrative games" and "playable stories" are differentiated primarily through their subordination of story to gameplay or vice versa (45). Thus, the Swipe Night fiction can be usefully conceptualized as gameplay, building on existing dating-based gamification. For instance, even before digitally mediated dating platforms, the "pickup" model of dating considered interactions between potential sexual partners to be governed by rules that participants can learn in order to "win" (Almog and Kaplan 28). Sites like Tinder extend the gamification of dating; for example, users on Tinder can "win" matches by adhering to a set of expectations regarding profile content and turn-based interactions.

Tinder was developed by Hatch Labs in 2012, and by 2013 users were swiping 350 millions times a day (Iqbal). Unlike other dating services, Tinder does not attempt to match users based on "personality, interests and preferences," and instead emphasizes physical appearance and proximity (Timmermans and De Caluwé 342). Due to the reduced nature of Tinder profiles, users make decisions based primarily on physical appearance (Tyson et al. 2). Likewise, location plays a major role in the potential matches with which users are presented; users can adjust their range to a minimum of 2 kilometers or a maximum of 160, and the application will show only those individuals reported to be within the specified distance (Newett et al. 349).

The swipe logic of the Tinder application encourages a game-like approach to matching with other users. David and Cambre (2016) define this swipe logic as "the pace, or the increased viewing speed encouraged by the UI" of the tinder application. Swipe Night plays into the gamification of the platform, enabling further interactivity through short fictional scenarios. Each choice a player makes moves the narrative forward, impacting potential future choices and ending scenarios. The rhizomatic structure of the Swipe Night narrative recalls earlier hyperfictions like Afternoon, A Story and Patchwork Girl, allowing players the agency to choose how the main character moves through the fictional world. Swipe Night provides the potential for users to discover commonalities, as players know that potential matches have made similar decisions as they work through the fiction.

These interactions, coupled with the new interactive narrative, highlight the gamification of social interactions that are common in dating apps and social media platforms. Deterding et al. highlight five game design levels that are commonly found in games. These levels are evident in normal Tinder swiping, but are further accentuated in the Swipe Night narrative. Game interface design patterns are "common, successful interaction design components and design solutions for a known problem in a context" (Deterding et al.), such as the awarding of badges, places on the leaderboard, and level advancement. On Tinder, users can earn badges by providing further data to the app—for example, if a user is currently attending a university, they can register their school email,

which in turn will provide them a badge on their profile with their school's name and pull users with the same school to the top of their "swipe stack." Users can also pay for Tinder plus, a service which allows them to opportunity to swipe as much as they want (without limits), swipe from different locations, and much more—all of which fall under Deterding's explanation of game design and patterns, which are, "commonly reoccurring parts of the design of a game that concerns gameplay"(3).

Swipe Night fits into Deterding's explanation of game design's principles and heuristics, as it offers the user a variety of ways to interact with the narrative through the format of interactive fiction. Users pick choices that could lead them to untold endings, and focus on the actions of playing in order to get there (3–4). Using the framework from Deterding et al., Swipe Night emerges as a further gamified experience for users, one that uses hypertextual fiction to facilitate connections between users.

Case Study

Swipe Night asked users, "What would you do if you suddenly had three hours until the end of the world?" In order to make decisions, users utilize the "swipe logic" of the app, where they swipe left or right to make choices (like they would on the profile of a potential match). Each week, users reached a specific "ending," but would be allowed to continue playing the next week, where their previous week's choices did not matter. Each user would start at a common place the following week, allowing for users to skip weeks without any consequence to them.

[Image 1: near here]

When users finished the episode for the night, they were given the option to share their results on their profile. If they did share their results on their profile, all of their answers would be visible to potential matches when the profile was fully opened (Figure 1). If the profile was not fully opened, other users would still be able to see what kind of ending someone played to through a "badge" on the profile's pictures (Figure 2). Finally, if users chose to not share their Swipe Night results, they could still be recommended top matches based on the results through tinder's algorithm.

[Image 2: near here]

In the narrative, the user begins at a party; partygoers are then alerted that an impending asteroid strike, which will decimate the Earth in just over three hours. Some of the choices offered to users in the first episode had them thinking of the ethics of the situation. One choice asked them to make fun of Molly's (another character) outfit, and another asked them to respect a friend's secret and not get in the middle of a couple's fight. One cast member's choice to tell would show that she is truthful and faithful to her friends, which could be a positive in a dating profile, as this is a positive value in a potential match (Perez; tinder, *Rico Nasty And The Cast*). The ethical dilemmas in Swipe Night echo the often-moral complicity that occurs in interactive fiction, as Rettberg writes (102): "IF also demonstrates how digital literary genres are shaped both by the technological platforms and the social contexts in which they are produced" (103).

Likewise, the second episode of Swipe Night likewise presents users with a variety of both practical, ethical, and what we are calling "meme" choices. "Meme" choices are often based off of common cultural capital and are designed to make the player laugh at their choice. For instance, the user is first asked to choose between grabbing a first aid kid or a bag of Cheetos (a popular snack among Gen Z). Upon exiting the convenience store, the user encounters two people, one of which calls out to the user to help, explaining, "Hey! He's really hurt!". The user must then decide whether to try to help or to ignore the injured man - although the user's ability to help is ultimately determined by whether or not they chose to take the first aid kit. Further, Swipe Night complicates seemingly straightforward issues of morality by tempering these decisions with the user's prior experiences and desire for self-preservation. For instance, although all three cast members interviewed indicated that they would help the injured man, they differed in their responses to a second, similar choice. When a young woman asks for help rescuing her sister from a ditch, two said they would but another said because of her cultural experience as a "New York asshole" she couldn't trust the woman. (tinder, *The Cast Of Swipe Night*). Each of these personality choices can help determine their pathways through the story and, consequently, their potential matches.

Episode 4 differs from the previous three, as the user is no longer asked to make decisions around survival, but rather to decide how to spend their remaining time alive. The "ultimate endings" of the interactive fiction differ according to the priorities of the user; for instance, users who choose to wait for the asteroid strike with their friends are given the "Love for the homies" ending, which includes the text, "Watched the comet together with Graham, Lucy, and Molly. Friendship is all that matters in the end." In contrast, users that choose to watch the asteroid strike alone are offered the opportunity to call their family. The call is instead answered by a stranger who claims to have found the phone. "I wonder what my family would say to me," he muses, and the user is presented with the choice to say either "I love you," or "I love you 3000" (a reference to Tony Stark's words to his daughter in *Avengers: Endgame*). Shortly after, the call disconnects and the user is presented with their ultimate ending, "Tried to call family and instead connected with a stranger. Told the man that his family loves him in a final act of kindness". Matches on Tinder are impacted by a user's priorities; for instance, those users who are particularly family-oriented would end up matching with others for whom family is similarly important.

Swipe Night's purpose was to get users to interact more with one another through this shared narrative. However, interaction is the sole purpose of Tinder, and begins with the sharing of data on a profile, and continues on to the ways that the algorithm tracks which profiles that a user is more likely to swipe right or left on. Albury et al. write that:

> […] all the interactions each user has with other users, every time they swipe right or left, the length of time between viewing a profile and initiating contact, and so on. These data are used by the app developers or publishers to optimize the user experience and enhance the opportunity to monetize that experience, and to learn how to improve the app (Albury et al. 3).

In theory, Swipe Night was supposed to help users find better matches by optimizing their experience through another category of data; yet, many users on the r/Tinder subreddit found the narrative to be "annoying," "dumb," and many reported not having better matches out of the experience. One user posted a screenshot, where their new match from Swipe Night echoed similar CYOA interactions in their message, saying that Swipe Night was a "win." However, in the same thread, another user responded with their own screenshot message where another user was rude and crass with them, with the accompanying thread, "I guess my Swipe Night isn't going that well…"("R/Tinder - Swipe Night!").

Results and Discussion

The sentiment analysis performed on the data is grouped into the ten top posts from the subreddit. We used the Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner (VADER) tool for our sentiment analysis. VADER is a lexicon and rule-based tool that is "specifically attuned to sentiments expressed in social media." VADER uses a combination of lexical features (like words, emojis, capitalization, and punctuation), which are then labeled as either positive, negative, or neutral. VADER also lists a score called "compound," which, "is a metric that calculates the sum of all the lexicon ratings which have been normalized between -1(most extreme negative) and +1 (most extreme positive)" (Pandey).

[Image 3 near here]

Firstly, these results show that there are an overwhelming amount of neutral statements, or statements that seem to contain no obvious positive or negative sentiment. Much of the conversation on the reddit was about if the app was working correctly or not, and if it was working, how one would launch the interactive narrative. Some users had to uninstall the app and reinstall before getting it to work, and the subreddit showed instances of trouble shooting. These threads and comments within conveyed a high correlation of neutral sentiment, as well as negative sentiment.

Cross-platform troubleshooting of technical issues is a prevalent phenomenon, as users turn to platforms that better facilitate the type of communication suited to collaborative problem solving. The Tinder platform itself only enables private exchanges of communication, preventing users from engaging in the crowdsourcing of technical issues. Moreover, the reddit platform, with its subreddits dedicated to specific topics, is particularly conducive to cross-platform troubleshooting, as evident by the existence of subreddits like r/deepfakestechtalk, where users discuss technical issues associated with DeepFakes, a face-swapping software hosted on GitHub (Winter and Salter). Although the r/Tinder subreddit is not dedicated specifically to problem solving technical issues, the prevalence of users turning to the subreddit for technical support indicates that users find both the reddit affordances and community particularly conducive to crowdsourcing issues with other platforms.

Secondly, the compound score has an overall negative sentiment. When looking at the compound column, there are four rows with deep/dark blue coloring and two other rows in blue, which signifies a strong negative response. These threads argued that Swipe Night was "fun, but useless," or "annoying," and that it often did not lead users to matches with persons who had answered similarly to their questions. Other users in the thread found that the swipe logic on the interactive narrative was different than their normal swiping tendencies and were frustrated because they felt that some of the choices did not represent their moral or ethical standards. Furthermore, some users found that the narrative choices, especially the covering for Graham's cheating choice, went along with scenarios in which they could not imagine themselves being physically or emotionally involved. One user commented that "the girls will hate my choice because I covered for Graham, but in all reality, I would have never even gotten involved in the first place."

While interactivity has commonly been associated with an increase in identification with characters (Lin), reactions to Swipe Night suggest that situations and choices to which players cannot relate can result in an opposite reaction, resulting in a lack of identification with characters and events, as well as potential disengagement from the story. Tinder users may be especially sensitive to choices in the Swipe Night fiction given its role in establishing potential matches, and thus its potential for impact offline, in their "real" lives. Issues related to ethics and morality (such as covering for a cheating friend) involve additional consideration, as users think about how these choices influence the type of people with whom they may match. Posts on r/Tinder that argued the narrative needed additional work and that the outcomes of possible matches needed to be changed suggest that users consciously considered the choices in Swipe Night in terms of their impact on future interactions with other users on the Tinder platform. Thus, user engagement with interactive fictions in a dating context differs from those without the potential for real world consequences.

Conclusions

Tinder's Swipe Night narrative not only highlights the gamification and hypertextual methods at play in modern-day dating, but brings to the forefront issues of morality and ethics in finding a potential partner. The context of the Swipe Night fiction on a platform ostensibly used for dating impacts audience reception of, and engagement with, the fiction, as it is perceived as having an impact on user matches; thus, questions of morality are more impactful than in a story disengaged from users' online identities. As indicated by user reactions on r/Tinder, interactive fictions with potential for real-world consequences prompt different responses and decision-making, therefore calling into question previous conceptions of readers of interactive fictions and highlighting the role of platform communities and affordances in user experience of these fictions.

Bibliography

Albury, Kath, et al. "Data Cultures of Mobile Dating and Hook-up Apps: Emerging
  Issues for Critical Social Science Research." *Big Data & Society*, vol. 4, no. 2,
  Dec. 2017, p. 205395171772095. *DOI.org (Crossref)*,
  doi:10.1177/2053951717720950.

Almog, Ran, and Danny Kaplan. "The Nerd and His Discontent: The Seduction
  Community and the Logic of the Game as a Geeky Solution to the Challenges of
  Young Masculinity." *Men and Masculinities*, vol. 20, no. 1, Apr. 2017, pp. 27–48.
  SAGE Journals, doi:10.1177/1097184X15613831.

Deterding, Sebastian, et al. "From Game Design Elements to Gamefulness: Defining
  'Gamification.'" *Proceedings of the 15th International Academic MindTrek
  Conference: Envisioning Future Media Environments*, Association for Computing
  Machinery, 2011, pp. 9–15. *ACM Digital Library*, doi:10.1145/2181037.2181040.

Hall, Margeret, et al. "Editorial of the Special Issue on Following User Pathways: Key
  Contributions and Future Directions in Cross-Platform Social Media Research."
  International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction, vol. 34, no. 10, Oct.
  2018, pp. 895–912. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*,
  doi:10.1080/10447318.2018.1471575.

Iqbal, Mansoor. "Tinder Revenue and Usage Statistics (2018)." *Business of Apps*, 2019,
  https://www.businessofapps.com/data/tinder-statistics/.

Koppel, Moshe, and Jonathan Schler. "THE IMPORTANCE OF NEUTRAL
  EXAMPLES FOR LEARNING SENTIMENT." *Computational Intelligence*, vol.

22, no. 2, May 2006, pp. 100–09. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8640.2006.00276.x.

Newett, Lyndsay, et al. "Forming Connections in the Digital Era: Tinder, a New Tool in Young Australian Intimate Life." *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 54, no. 3, Sept. 2018, pp. 346–61. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/1440783317728584.

Pandey, Paul. "Simplifying Sentiment Analysis Using VADER in Python (on Social Media Text)." *Medium*, Sept. 2018, https://medium.com/analytics-vidhya/simplifying-social-media-sentiment-analysis-using-vader-in-python-f9e6ec6fc52f.

Pang, Bo, et al. "Thumbs up?: Sentiment Classification Using Machine Learning Techniques." *Proceedings of the ACL-02 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing - EMNLP '02*, vol. 10, Association for Computational Linguistics, 2002, pp. 79–86. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.3115/1118693.1118704.

Perez, Sarah. "Tinder's Interactive Video Series 'Swipe Night' Is Going International next Year." *TechCrunch*, 2019, http://social.techcrunch.com/2019/11/06/tinders-interactive-video-series-swipe-night-is-going-international-next-year/.

Piredda, Francesca, et al. "Social Media Fiction." *Interactive Storytelling*, edited by Henrik Schoenau-Fog et al., vol. 9445, Springer, 2015, pp. 309–20, doi:https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-27036-4_29.

Rettberg, Scott. *Electronic Literature*. Polity Press, 2019.

"R/Tinder - Swipe Night!" *Reddit*,

    https://www.reddit.com/r/Tinder/comments/do1g6o/swipe_night/. Accessed 17

    Feb. 2020.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. "From Narrative Games to Playable Stories: Toward a Poetics of

    Interactive Narrative." *Storyworld: A Journey of Narrative Studies*, vol. Vol. 1,

    2009, pp. 43–59.

Timmermans, Elisabeth, and Elien De Caluwé. "Development and Validation of the

    Tinder Motives Scale (TMS)." *Computers in Human Behavior*, vol. 70, May

    2017, pp. 341–50. *DOI.org (Crossref)*, doi:10.1016/j.chb.2017.01.028.

tinder. *Official :45 Trailer | Swipe Night*. 2019,

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkZkHyt6TZA.

---. *Rico Nasty And The Cast Of Swipe Night Reveal Their Choices | Episode 1*.

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afdQdwdyAyA. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

---. *The Cast Of Swipe Night Reveal Their Choices | Episode 2*.

    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-SeNwaNVlo. Accessed 27 Jan. 2020.

Tyson, Gareth, et al. "A First Look at User Activity on Tinder." *ArXiv:1607.01952 [Cs]*,

    July 2016. *arXiv.org*, http://arxiv.org/abs/1607.01952.

Winter, Rachel, and Anastasia Salter. "DeepFakes: Uncovering Hardcore Open Source

    on GitHub." *Porn Studies*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2019, pp. 382–97,

    doi:10.1080/23268743.2019.1642794.